

Observations on the narration attributed to Imam Mujahid ibn Jabar regarding the ascription of a Makan (“Place”) for Allah

Praise be to Allah that is due from all grateful believers, a fullness of praise for all his favours: a praise that is abundantly sincere and blessed. May the blessings of Allah be upon our beloved Master Muhammad, the chosen one, the Apostle of mercy and the seal of all Prophets (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all); and upon his descendants who are upright and pure: a blessing lasting to the Day of Judgment, like the blessing bestowed upon the Prophet Ibrahim (*alaihis salam*) and his descendants. *May Allah be pleased with all of the Prophetic Companions (Ashab al-Kiram). Indeed, Allah is most worthy of praise and supreme glorification!*

An internet forum contributor known as Harris Hammam (real name being Isma'il Patel) could not explain why Imam al-Bayhaqi did not affirm a Makan like he personally does, when for sure he also knew that Imam al-Bayhaqi clearly transmitted Mujahid's narration with the wording for Makan! Recall, Imam al-Bayhaqi is not only an Ash'arite in creed but also a major Hafiz of Hadith in his age. Indeed, he was a true Imam of Ahlul Hadith, unlike today's claimants. Imam al-Bayhaqi knew no one to quote before from al-Salaf or during his time that used a version of a narration attributed to Imam Mujahid mentioning Makan – to be an absolute proof to definitely affirm Makan for Allah! Harris's manhaj in aqeeda is to use Maqtu narrations as a source of aqeeda in order to affirm a Makan for Allah. While, the real Sunni methodology is to start with what Allah affirmed for himself and then what was transmitted by His Messenger (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam), followed by the Sahaba and then those who took from them amongst the rightly guided one's.

Harris thinks he can avoid this issue so he humiliatingly tried his own digression tactic – hoping his admirers wouldn't fathom why al-Bayhaqi doesn't affirm a Makan using Mujahid's variant narration!! Thus, we have the understanding of a Master of Hadith and other major disciplines known

as Imam al-Bayhaqi - on one side mentioning a variant of the narration at hand but not understanding it with all his mastery of arabic language to be a definite and conclusive proof for the affirmation of a Makan, versus – on the other hand a band of unknown would be “Aqeeda specialists” from this age like Harris Hammam opposing the likes of the great, al-Bayhaqi. The wise reader can draw his own conclusions to where the truth lies based on the latter scenario.

The likes of Harris et al have taken to imitate the likes of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya on this narration, who was far less of a genuine authority on creedal matters than those who preceded him. If this camp were to be open and honest they may take the liberty to show their opponents how many times did ibn al-Qayyim use weak or even forged narrations to establish his creed, in comparison to their opponents in his various works like *al-Ijtima al-Juyush al-Islamiyya* and *al-Sawa’iq al-Mursila*.

Nevertheless, it is wise to mention what is known to us to date on this narration and its variant wordings.

One of Harris’s ilk posting under the name Bassam Zawadi mentioned the narration from Mujahid (ra) on the following link:

<http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vbe/showpost.php?p=39129&postcount=1>

حدثنا الوليد حدثنا محمد بن عمار حدثنا يحيى حدثنا شبيل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد رحمه الله تعالى في قوله تعالى وقربناه نجيا قال بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب حجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة وحجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة فما زال موسى عليه السلام يقرب حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب فلما رأى مكانه وسمع صريف القلم قال رب أرني أنظر إليك

Al Waleed - Muhammad bin Amaar - Yahya -Shibil - Ibn Abi Najeesh - Mujahid said in regards to Allah's statement *wa qarabnaahu najeeya* (19:52): Between the fourth heaven (or he said) seventh heaven, and between the Throne there are 70,000 veils. These are veils of light and veils of darkness. Musa kept getting closer until there was between him (i.e. Musa) and Him (i.e. Allah) a single veil. So when he saw His (i.e. Allah) place and heard the chirping of the Pen [He said My Lord allow me to look at you].

The wording “fourth heaven” is found only in Tafsir al-Tabari as will be mentioned below and not in al-Azama of Abul al-Shaykh or later by al-Bayhaqi in his al-Asma wal Sifat. The translator of the Arabic wording also failed to mention that the above version stating: “Between the fourth heaven (or he said) seventh heaven.” - Is found only in Tafsir al-Tabari without stating “He saw His place.”!

Besides this point the Arabic quote that Bassam provided doesn't mention anything about the Fourth Heaven but Seventh heaven alone (as highlighted above). Thus, it seems that either Bassam or someone he may have taken it from has mixed up part of al-Tabari's wording with what is found in al-Azama of Abu al-Shaykh! If they did this by mistake one wonders why the person didn't mention that al-Tabari's version has no mention of the key word, “Makan”?!

Will the likes of Harris accuse the likes of Bassam of tampering with the wording of the above narration or will they flatter themselves with excuses?

Now the common questions that arise from this narration are as follows:

i) Imam Mujahid provided no source for his tafsir, so if it isn't proven from the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) or any of the Sahaba with chains of transmission, then why should the common masses or their Ulama accept it to be truly what Musa (alaihis salam) actually experienced according to the above wording? In Fath al-Bari (13/425) of the Ash'arite Amir al-Mu'minin in Hadith, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, there is mention that the famous student of Ibn Abbas (ra) known as Ikrima rejected the Ru'ya of Allah while Mujahid and Abu Salih gave a Ta'wil of it as follows:

وقد أخرج عبد بن حميد عن عكرمة من وجه آخر إنكار الرؤية، ويمكن الجمع بالحمل على غير أهل الجنة.

وأخرج بسند صحيح عن مجاهد: ناظرة تنظر الثواب، وعن أبي صالح نحوه

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Hence, these are shadh (aberrant) positions from well known Imams of the Salaf which oppose a number of Ahadith affirming Ru'ya. Will the likes of Harris call the named Imams Jahmiyya for this Ta'wil or the inkar of al-Ru'ya?! Will they allow the common masses to imitate the views of these Imams and their positions on Ru'ya, or will they say they are actually Shadh as they oppose authentic ahadith?!

Rather, the safest method is to quote what Allah's Messenger (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) or his Companions said about the verse from Sura Maryam (19: 52):

Then, review if Mujahid's explanation(s) has any support from Marfu ahadith or at least some Mawquf narrations from the Sahaba, like Ibn Abbas (ra), who was Mujahid's principal teacher in tafsir.

Harris et al can see the approach of an individual they admire known as Uthman al-Darimi, and how he looked at the Ta'wil attributed to Mujahid on the issue of the Ru'ya here from one of their own ilk:

<http://islamicssciences.wordpress.com/2007/02/07/establishing-al-ruyah-and-a-narration-from-a-tabii/>

This point from al-Darimi is quite pertinent for Harris et al to consider:

[Some of them have used as evidence the statement of Mujāhid:](#)

“Faces on that day shall be bright, looking (*nādhirah*) at their Lord” [Al-Qiyāmah:22-23]

He said, “They await the reward of their Lord.”

We say: yes, they await the reward of their Lord, and there is no reward greater than looking at His Face, Most Blessed and High is He.

If you insist on remaining attached to this *hadīth* of Mujāhid and to rely on it to the exclusion of all other narrations (*Āthār*), then this is a sign of your straying (*shudhūd*) from the truth and your following falsehood, for if this claim of yours were established from Mujāhid in the manner that you understand it, it would be a rejected opinion because of these authentic narrations concerning it from Allāh's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), His Companions, and the assembly (*Jamā'ah*) of the Followers (*Tābi'īn*). Have you not claimed that you do not accept these narrations (*Āthār*) nor rely on them as proof. Therefore, how can you use the narration from Mujāhid as proof when you find a way to hang on to it due to your falsehood without clarification. What is more, you abandon the narrations (*Āthār*) from Allāh's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), his Companions, and the Followers when they contradict your view (*madhhab*). However, if you acknowledge the acceptance of the narration of Mujāhid, then you have passed judgment on yourself that you must accept the narrations (*Āthār*) from Allāh's Messenger, his Companions, and the Followers after them, because you did not hear this from Mujāhid. Rather, you narrate it from him a chain of narration (*isnād*), while you narrate chains (*asānīd*) similar to it or better than it from the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم), the Companions, and the Followers which contradict it in your view. Therefore, how could you impose on yourselves to follow the unclear (*mushtabih*) narration of Mujāhid alone, while you left the authentic (*sahīh*), explicit (*mansūs*) narrations from Allāh's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم)

(وسلم), His Companions, and the peers of Mujāhid from the Followers, except due to doubt and deviation (*shudhūd*) from the truth.

Indeed, the one who desires deviation (*shudhūd*) from the truth follows the strange (*shādh*) opinions of the scholars and hangs on to their slips. However, the one who seeks the truth for himself follows the well known (*mashhūr*) opinions of their assembly (*jamā'ah*) and he follows their understanding. So, these are two signs as to whether a man is a follower or an innovator.

Take for example, Imam al-Nasa'i, in his Sunan al-Kubra, under the verse from Surah Maryam he mentioned one narration from the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) alone regarding Musa (alaihis salam) and Adam (alaihis salam):

قوله تعالى وقربناه نجيا

[11318] أنا عبيد الله بن فضالة بن إبراهيم أنا موسى بن إسماعيل نا حماد بن سلمة عن حميد عن الحسن عن جندب عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال لقي آدم موسى فقال موسى يا آدم أنت الذي خلقك الله بيده وأسجد لك ملائكته وأسكنك جنته ونفخ فيك من روحه قال آدم يا موسى أنت الذي اصطفاك الله برسالاته وآتاك التوراة وكلمك وقربك نجيا فأنا أقدم أم الذكر قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فحج آدم موسى فحج آدم موسى

Thus, Harris et al need to start by quoting Sahih ahadith first and foremost to affirm that Musa (alaihis salam) did actually encounter what Mujahid is said to have transmitted.

On the verse from Sura Maryam the following has been attributed to the most learned Mufasssir from the Sahaba, namely Abdullah Ibn Abbas (radiallahu anhuma) in the Musannaf of ibn Abi Shayba:

No. 31845 –

حدثنا وكيع عن سفيان عن عطاء بن السائب عن سعيد بن جبير عن بن عباس وقربناه نجيا حتى سمع صريف القلم

Another version in the Mustadrak of al-Hakim:

3414 - أخبرنا أبو بكر محمد بن عبد الله بن أحمد الحفيد ثنا أحمد بن نصر اللباد أنبأ أبو نعيم ثنا عطاء بن السائب عن سعيد بن جبير عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما : — { **و قربناه نجيا** } قال : **سمع صريف القلم حين كتب في اللوح**
هذا حديث صحيح الإسناد و لم يخرجاه

Similarly, there is another variant from ibn Abbas and Maysara in the Kitab al-Zuhd of Hannad al-Sirri:

149 - حدثنا وكيع وقيصة عن سفيان عن عطاء بن السائب عن سعيد ابن جبير عن ابن عباس في قوله تعالى **و قربناه نجيا** مريم **52** قال أدني حتى **سمع صريف القلم في الألواح**
150 - حدثنا أبو الأحوص عن عطاء بن السائب عن ميسرة في قوله تعالى لموسى عليه السلام **و قربناه نجيا** مريم **52** قال أدني حتى **سمع صريف القلم في الألواح**

ii) Can Harris et al guarantee that Imam Mujahid didn't get this explanation from the Isra'iliyyat narrations? If they say it is not from the Isra'iliyyat then the onus is on them to prove where Mujahid took it from amongst the Sahaba, like Ibn Abbas (ra). It is not possible that Mujahid could have discovered the wording for the narration besides hearing it from someone else or reading it from elsewhere as it is a matter pertaining to the unseen (ghayb) matters. Indeed, Imam al-Dhahabi has also mentioned in his Mizan al-I'tidal (3/439) that Imam Mujahid would take things from the Ahlul-Kitab, meaning the Isra'iliyyat narrations at times. Quote from the Mizan:

وقال أبو بكر بن عياش: قلت للاعمش: ما بال تفسير مجاهد مخالف - أو شيء نحوه ؟ قال: **أخذها من أهل الكتاب.**

Imam al-Dhahabi also mentioned the following about Imam Mujahid in his Siyar a'lam an-Nubala (4/455, Risala edn):

قُلْتُ: وَلِمُجَاهِدٍ أَقْوَالٌ وَغَرَائِبُ فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالتَّفْسِيرِ تُسْتَنْكَرُ، وَبَلَعْنَا: أَنَّهُ ذَهَبَ إِلَى بَابِلَ، وَطَلَبَ مِنْ مُتَوَلِّيِّهَا أَنْ يُوقِفَهُ عَلَى هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ.
قَالَ: فَبِعَثَ مَعِيَ يَهُودِيًّا، حَتَّى أَتَيْنَا تَنْوْرًا فِي الْأَرْضِ، فَكَشَفَ لَنَا عَنْهُمَا، فَإِذَا بِهِمَا مُعَلَّقَانِ مُنْكَسَانِ.
فَقُلْتُ: آمَنْتُ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَكُمَا، فَاضْرِبَا.
فَغَشِيَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَى الْيَهُودِيِّ، ثُمَّ أَفْقْنَا بَعْدَ حِينٍ، فَلَامَنِي الْيَهُودِيُّ، وَقَالَ: كِدْتَ أَنْ تُهْلِكَنَا.

Dr GF Haddad translated the above some 10 years back as follows:

"Mujahid has certain strange sayings pertaining to knowledge and commentary of Qur'an which are rejected and condemned. A report has reached us whereby he went to Babel and asked its governor to show him [the angels] Harut and Marut.

Mujahid said: 'The governor sent a Jew to go with me until we arrived at a grotto under the earth and he showed them to me. They were suspended upside down. I said: "I believe in the One Who created the two of you." At that time they shuddered, and both I and the Jew fainted. We came to after a while, and the Jew said to me: You nearly caused our death!"

Note, that the Siyar of al-Dhahabi was compiled in the latter part of his life while his Kitab al-Uluw was one of his earlier works.

iii) Can Harris prove that Imam Mujahid himself used what he is said to have narrated to hold and propagate the belief of a Makan for Allah? For, not everything a narrator may convey is used by himself in his personal aqeeda or matters pertaining to fiqh. Especially more so when it comes to the narration at hand and its strong possibility of it being a conveyance of the Isra'iliyyat!

iv) Imam Mujahid was narrating a wording connected to the matters of Ilm-ul-Ghayb (knowledge of the unseen) and such delicate matters if not directly ascribed back to the Qur'an, authentic ahadith or established reports from the Sahaba, as in this case for affirming a Makan for Allah can not be taken as an absolute Hujja in aqeeda. This methodology is seemingly opposed by the likes of Harris et al. If they think they can take into their personal beliefs the maqtu (severed) reports of eminent Tabi'in on lone issues of creed, and especially pertaining to the Ghayb, which are unsupported from the Qur'an, Sunna or at least the Sahaba – then let them prove this usul (methodology) of theirs to be a sound method in confirming this point of Makan as a point valid to hold in Islamic creedal matters (aqeeda).

A look at the variant wordings ascribed back to Imam Mujahid:

The versions of the narration ascribed to Mujahid are also of varying wording as may be seen by comparative analysis of the known asanid:

A) Tafsir al-Tabari:

حدثنا محمد بن منصور الطوسي، قال: ثنا يحيى بن أبي بكير، قال: ثنا شبل، عن ابن أبي نجيح، قال: أراه عن مجاهد، في قوله (وَقَرَّبَنَاهُ نَجِيًّا) قال: بين السماء الرابعة، أو قال: السابعة، وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب: حجاب نور، وحجاب ظلمة، وحجاب نور، وحجاب ظلمة؛ فما زال يقرب موسى حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب، وسمع صريف القلم (قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ)

B) Al-Azama of Abu al-Shaykh:

جزء 2 – صفحة 690]

18 – حدثنا الوليد حدثنا محمد بن عمار حدثنا يحيى حدثنا شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد رحمه الله تعالى في قوله عز وجل وقربناه نجيا قال بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب حجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة وحجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة فما زال موسى عليه السلام يقرب حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب فلما رأى مكانه وسمع صريف القلم قال رب أريني أنظر إليك

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[جزء 2 – صفحة 714]

40 – حدثنا الوليد حدثنا محمد بن عمار حدثنا يحيى حدثنا شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد رحمه الله تعالى في قوله عز وجل وقربناه نجيا قال بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب حجاب نور

وحجاب ظلمة وحجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة فما زال موسى صلى الله على نبينا وعليه وسلم يقرب حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب فلما رأى مكانه وسمع صريف القلم قال رب أرني أنظر إليك

C) Kitab al Asma wal Sifat of al-Bayhaqi (no. 855):

وأخبرنا أبو عبد الله ، ثنا أبو العباس ، ثنا محمد بن إسحاق ، أنا روح ، ثنا شبل ، عن ابن أبي نجيح ، قال : أراه عن مجاهد ، (وقربناه نجيا) قال : بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب ، حجاب نور ، وحجاب ظلمة ، وحجاب نور ، وحجاب ظلمة ، فما زال يقرب موسى حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب واحد ، فلما رأى مكانه وسمع صريف القلم قال : رب أرني أنظر إليك . يعني والله أعلم يقربه من العرش حتى كان بين موسى وبين العرش حجاب واحد

It is also known that ibn Abi Najih didn't hear tafsir directly from Mujahid but only from al-Qasim ibn Abi Bazza, who heard Tafsir from Mujahid.

In Imam al-Tabari's sanad there is a link of 4 narrators between him and Imam Mujahid:

محمد بن منصور الطوسي، قال: ثنا يحيى بن أبي بكر، قال: ثنا شبل، عن ابن أبي نجيح

This version doesn't mention the Makan as known and one of the narrators said that there are 70,000 veils between - the fourth heaven and the Arsh, or it is said, between the seventh heaven and the Arsh.

Imam Abu al-Shaykh mentioned it in 2 places with a link of 5 narrators between him and Mujahid with very identical wording:

حدثنا الوليد حدثنا محمد بن عمار حدثنا يحيى حدثنا شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد

While Imam al-Bayhaqi's chain of transmission contained 6 links between himself and Mujahid:

وأخبرنا أبو عبد الله ، ثنا أبو العباس ، ثنا محمد بن إسحاق ، أنا روح ، ثنا شبل ، عن ابن أبي نجيح ، قال :
أراه عن مجاهد

The shorter the chain back to Mujahid the more likely it is that the narration has been more meticulously conveyed. Looking at al-Bayhaqi's version the last bit of the narration has this extra wording not found in al-Tabari or Abu al-Shaykh's versions where there is a mention of one Hijab between Musa (alaihissalam) and the Arsh:

يعني والله أعلم : يقربه من العرش حتى كان بين موسى وبين العرش حجاب واحد

One may wonder if this last line is from al-Bayhaqi's own explanation or the words of Mujahid himself. The manner it has been presented seems to indicate that it is ascribed back to Mujahid or one of the sub narrators added it to the words received from Mujahid. Looking at the scan from al-Bayhaqi's Kitab al-Asma wal Sifat (as edited by Abdullah al-Hashidi from the same way as Harris in creedal matters) one may observe the following:

(٨٥٥) وأخبرنا أبو عبد الله ثنا أبو العباس ثنا محمد بن إسحاق أنا روح ثنا
شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح - قال أراه عن مجاهد ﴿ وَقَرَّبْنَاهُ نَجِيًّا ﴾ [مریم: ٥٢] قال بين
السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب، حجاب نور، وحجاب ظلمة،
وحجاب نور، وحجاب ظلمة، فما زال يقرب موسى حتى كان بينه وبينه حجاب
واحد، فلما رأى مكانه وسمع صرير القلم قال: رب أرني أنظر إليك، يعني والله
أعلم يقربه من العرش حتى كان بين موسى وبين العرش حجاب واحد .

Thus, after the wording from the Qur'an (7: 143) mentioned in the fifth line of the above scan

رب أرني أنظر إليك

The editor, Abdullah al-Hashidi placed a comma which followed with words that indicate it to be unlikely as the explanation of al-Bayhaqi, but from Mujahid or one of the sub narrators. If it were the words of al-Bayhaqi then the editor would have most likely placed it in the next paragraph.

Thus, we appear to have three variant wordings of the narration with chains of transmission that all run back to the common link:

شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد

If all three versions of the narration from Mujahid are equivalent in strength then one may even assert that there may be idtirab (shakiness) in the matn (text). For, the definition of a Mudtarib narration includes the scenario whereby all the chains of transmission are of equivalent strength, as is the case here, but it is not possible to prefer one variant wording over the other. In such a situation, even if the chains appear sound on the surface, the hidden defect (illa) that is now apparent via comparative analysis of the texts leads to the ultimate conclusion that the text of the narration is overall Mudtarib (shaky), and the Mudtarib narrations are part and parcel of the Mardud (rejected) narrations in Mustalah al-hadith (terminology of hadith). Thus, it is quite likely that the text is da'eef overall.

If someone were to say that no one has declared the narration to be mudtarib before, then one may ask the opponents – How many people have put forward before you all the known variant wordings for this narration and explained why there appear to be three differing wordings on subtle points? If it is not mudtarib according to the technical definition then what is the technical definition for this type of narration with regards to its textual content? If they find this all unusual, then may be they can free themselves off from bias and fanaticism from the likes of Nasir al-Albani who is known to have opposed the gradings of a number of major Huffaz of hadith before his time on specific narrations, as well as providing gradings that he was alone in and not supported by anyone before him. Or is it going to be a case of double standards?

Having said that, there is also another version recorded by al-Imam al-Hafiz Jalalud-Din al-Suyuti in his *al-La'ali al-Masnu'a fi'l ahadith al Mawdu'a* (1/24) from Abul Shaykh's *Kitab al-Azama* as follows:

وقال حدثنا الوليد حدثنا محمد بن عمار حدثنا يحيى حدثنا شبل عن ابن أبي نجيح عن مجاهد قال
بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب حجاب من نور وحجاب من ظلمة
وحجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة

This version has the same chain as the two narrations already mentioned from the printed edition of Kitab al-Azama, except that:

i) It doesn't appear in the above format in the printed version of al-Azama. It may be claimed that al-Suyuti abridged the narration by leaving out the relevant Qur'anic verses and the story attributed to Musa (alaihis salam). Or it may be that it was transmitted as given above by al-Suyuti in the manuscript(s) of al-Azama that he used in the 9th century after Hijra. Wallahu a'lam.

ii) The above highlighted text is found with similar wording in the lengthier versions mentioned earlier from Tafsir al-Tabari, al-Azama of Abu al-Shaykh and al-Asma wal Sifat of al-Bayhaqi.

iii) The above narration from al-Suyuti's al-La'ali was also mentioned with similar wording back to Mujahid without mention of the chain of transmission in the Tafsir known as *Ma'alim al Tanzil* (7/140) of Muhy al-Sunna, al-Baghawi (d. 516 AH):

وقال مجاهد: بين السماء السابعة وبين العرش سبعون ألف حجاب من نور، وحجاب من ظلمة وحجاب نور وحجاب ظلمة.

This last version was also mentioned with similar wording from Mujahid without mentioning the asanid (chains of transmission) in the Tafsir of al-Qurtubi (15/295) and Tafsir of Alaud-Din Khazin (6/79).

We also know that Imam al-Bayhaqi didn't state that the narration is a proof for affirming a Makan for Allah, as do the likes of Harris et al, thus the latter group are at odds with a major master of Hadith and creed on this issue as asserted earlier, for we know that al-Bayhaqi was not a promoter of a Makan for Allah! Nor was his predecessor, the Imam Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari. Nor does it appear that Imam al-Tabari after mentioning the narration from Mujahid exclusively affirmed a Makan for Allah in any positive manner.

Finally, the reader may wish to clue up on what are Isra'iliyyat narrations and their significance and applicability in the Shari'a as a whole.

Let us quote from one of the scholars of the last century from the same doctrinal school as Harris it appears, namely Ahmed Shakir and what he quoted from the Mufassir and Muhaddith, Ibn Kathir regarding Isra'iliyyat types of narrations. See here:

<http://islamicsciences.wordpress.com/2006/09/03/israiliyat-in-tafsir-shaykh-ahmad-shakirs-view/>

The Place of *Isra'iliyyat* in Tafsir

By Shaykh Ahmad Shakir

From his introduction to *'Umdah at-Tafsir 'an al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir* [1/14-17], his summary of *Tafsir ibn Kathir*

Al-Hafiz ibn Kathir has some strong words concerning the issue of *Isra'iliyyat* and narrating them. With regards to some of them, he clarified his stance concerning them. Despite that, I have found him mentioning some. Frequently, he follows them up with comments in refutation. Therefore, I thought that I should gather together in this introduction some of what I found during my reading of it (i.e. his Tafsir) which I had recorded. Perhaps I will be able to gather the things that I overlooked and then mention them upon completion of this book (*Al-'Umdah*), if Allah wills.

So he stated in the introduction of his Tafsir (pp. 43,44) after mentioning the hadith, **“Convey from me, even if it be an *ayah*, and narrate from the Children of Isra'il, and there is no sin in that. And whoever lies upon me deliberately, then let him take his place in the Hellfire”**:

However, **these Isra'ili narrations are mentioned for supporting evidences, not to be relied on in and of themselves**, so they are of three categories:

One of them: That which we to be correct because our sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) testify to its truthfulness, so that is correct.

And the second: That which we know its falsehood because our sources contradict it.

And the third: That about which no position is taken, it is not of either type, so we do not believe in it, nor do we reject it, while it is permissible to cite due to what has preceded.

It should be noted that most of them contain no benefit in any religious matter, and for this reason, the scholars of the People of the Book themselves disagree concerning these types of issues a great deal. As a result, there is much disagreement amongst the *mufasssirun*^[1] as well. Examples of this are what they mention concerning the names of the People of the Cave, the color of their dog, and their number; and concerning the staff of Musa, and what type of tree it was from; and the types of birds that Allah brought back to life for Ibrahim, and; the part of the cow with which the murdered person was struck with (to bring him back to life); and the type of tree that Allah spoke to Musa from; and other matters Allah left unexplained which contains no benefit for people in their worldly affairs or in their religious affairs. However,

reporting their disagreement is permissible, as Allah (تعالى) said, **“They will say three, and the fourth of them was their dog,”** until the end of the verse.

Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, may Allah pardon him states:^[2] The permission to narrate from them concerning that which we do not have proof of its truth or falsehood is one thing, and mentioning that in *tafsir* of the Qur'an, and making it an opinion or an explanation of the meaning of verses, or in particularizing that which was not particularized in it, or in clarifying the details of what was mentioned in it in general form is something else. This is because mentioning something like this next to the Speech of Allah might give the mistaken impression that this report which we do not know to be true or false explains the statement of Allah (سبحانه), and clarifies the details of what is general in it! Allah and His Book are free of that! Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), when he permitted narrating from them, he ordered us to not affirm nor reject what they say, and what affirmation of their narrations and their opinions can be stronger than connecting them to the Book of Allah, and placing them next to it in the place for *tafsir* or explanation?! O Allah, (we seek) forgiveness.^[3]

Al-Hafiz ibn Kathir has himself stated in the commentary on verse 50 from *Surah al-Kahf*, after mentioning opinions concerning *Iblis* and his name and which tribe he is from:

There are many narrations that have been reported from the *Salaf* concerning this, and the majority of them are from the *Isra'iliyyat* which are reported so that they may be examined, and Allah knows best what is the true condition of many of them. Amongst them is that which we can affirm with certainty that it is falsehood, due to its contradicting our sources, and the Qur'an suffices us from the reports of the preceding (nations), because hardly any of them is free from distortion, subtraction, or addition, and because many of them are forgeries. This is because they do not have amongst them the precise *Huffaz*^[4] who eliminate from their narrations the distortions of exaggerators and the forgeries of the falsifiers, like the Imams and scholars, the noble and pious, the righteous and distinguished ones, from the verifying, master scholars and great *Huffaz* that this Ummah possesses who recorded the *Hadiths* and verified them, and clarified the *Sahih* and *Hasan* from the weak, the rejected and fabricated. They identified the fabricators, the liars, and the unknown narrators, and the other various classes of narrators. All of this was to protect the Station of the Seal of the Messengers and the Chief of Mankind (صلى الله عليه وسلم), so that falsehood not be attributed to him, or that something that is not from him should be reported from him, so may Allah be pleased with them and may He please them, and may he may make the Gardens of *al-Firdaws* their abode. And truly He has done so.

In the commentary on verses 51-56 from *Surah al-Anbiya* ' after indicating the relationship of Ibrahim (عليه السلام) with his father, and his looking towards the stars and the created things, he stated:

Many of the stories which many of the scholars of *tafsir* and other than them have mentioned are from the narrations of the Children of Isra'il. So whatever of it agrees with the truth that we have coming from a *ma'soom*^[5], we accept it, due to its agreeing with what is authentic, and whatever of it contradicts anything of that, we reject it, and that which neither agrees nor contradicts, we do not affirm it or reject it, rather we refrain from taking a position concerning it. **Many of the *Salaf* allowed for narrating this type of narrations, and many**

of them contain no benefit, and there is no conclusion that can be drawn from them that is of any religious benefit. If it had a benefit for people in their religion, this perfect, all-encompassing *shari'ah* would have explained it. The path that we have tread in this commentary is to avoid mention of much of these *Isra'ili* narrations, because they merely waste time, and because many of them merely contain the falsehood which was in circulation amongst them. This is because they make no distinction between what is authentic and what is weak as the precise *Huffaz* and Imams of this *Ummah* do.

At the end of his commentary on verse 102 of *Surah al-Baqarah*, he stated:

There are narrations concerning the story of Harut and Marut from a group of the *tabi'in*, such as Mujahid, as-Suddi, al-Hasan al-Basri, Qatadah, Abu al-'Aliyah, az-Zuhri, ar-Rabi' ibn Anas, Muqatil ibn Hayyan, and others, and many of the scholars of tafsir, from the early ones and the later ones, mentioned these stories. In their details, they are dependent upon the reports of the Children of Isra'il, for there is not a single authentic, *marfu'* [6] *hadith* with a connected chain going back to the Truthful, Believed One who is guarded from error, the one who does not speak based on desire, concerning this. The apparent meaning of the Qur'an leaves the mention of the story in general form without going into great depths and without any exaggeration, so we believe in what has been mentioned in the Qur'an as Allah (تعالى) intended it, and Allah is most knowledgeable concerning the reality of the affair.

He stated at the beginning of *Surah Qaf*:

It has been narrated from some of the *salaf* that they said, "*Qaf* is a mountain that surrounds the whole earth, and it is called Mount Qaf!" And it is as if this, and Allah knows best, is from the superstitions of the Children of Isra'il that some of the people took from them, because of their considering it to be permissible to narrate from them that which is not affirmed nor rejected. I think that this and its likes are from the forgery of some of the *Zanadiqah* [7] amongst them who deceive the people concerning the matter of their religion, just as *hadiths* have been fabricated upon the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in this *Ummah* – despite the great status of its scholars, *Huffaz*, and Imams – even though it has not been such a long time. So how about the nation of *Bani Isra'il*, what with the great time that has passed, the lack of precise *Huffaz* amongst them, their drinking alcoholic drinks, their scholars twisting the words from their places and changing Allah's Books and Verses.

The Legislator only permitted narrating from them in his statement, '**Relate from the Children of Isra'il, and there is no sin in that,**' concerning that which the intellect can conceive, but as for what the intellects find to be impossible, and it is deemed falsehood, and it is fairly obvious that it is a forgery – then it is not included in that.

In the commentary of verses 41-44 of *Surah an-Naml*, after mentioning a long narration from ibn 'Abbas concerning the story of the Queen of Sheba, which he characterized as "*munkar, gharib jiddan* (rejected, extremely strange)," he stated:

What is most likely concerning the likes of these reports is that they are taken from the People of the Book, from what is found in their scrolls, such as the narrations of Ka'b and Wahb, may Allah be kind with them concerning the strange, outlandish, and fanciful

reports that they reported to this *ummah* from the Children of Isra'il, some of which occurred and some of which did not, and some of which were distorted or changed or abrogated. Allah (سبحانه) has sufficed us from that with something which is more correct than it and better, clearer, and more beneficial. And to Allah belongs the Praise and the Grace.

In the commentary on verse 46 of *Surah al-'Ankabut*, after relating the hadith, **“When the People of the Book narrate to you, do not believe nor reject them,”** he stated:

Then, it should be known that most of what they narrate is falsehood and forgery, because distortion, change, and false interpretation have entered into it, and truth is very rare in their reports, and even if it were authentic, it is of little benefit.

In the commentary on verse 190 of *Surah al-A'raf*, he stated:

Their reports are of three types: from them is that which we know its correctness, as indicated by evidence from the Book of Allah or the Sunnah of His Messenger, from them is that which we know its falsehood, as the opposite of it has been proven by evidence from the Book and the Sunnah, and from them is that about which no position is to be taken, so it is permissible to relate, due to His statement (عليه الصلاة والسلام), **“Narrate from the Children of Isra'il, and there is no sin in that.”** This applies to that which cannot actually be confirmed or rejected, due to his statement, **“Do not believe them nor reject them.”**

There is a very long story that an-Nasa'i reports in the chapter of *at-Tafsir* in *as-Sunan al-Kubra* – which we have not seen[8] – and Ibn Abi Hatim reports in his *Tafsir*, from Ibn 'Abbas, and al-Hafiz ibn Kathir refers to it as the Hadith of “*al-Fatun*.” He relates it in full in the commentary of His (تعالى) statement, **“And We tried you with a heavy trial (*fatuna*),”** from verse 40 of *Surah Ta-Ha*. Then he stated:

It is *mawquf*[9] from the statement of ibn 'Abbas, and there is nothing *marfu'* concerning any of its contents except a little bit, **and it is as if ibn Abbas took it from that which has been permitted to narrate of Isra'iliyyat, from Ka'b al-Ahbar or other than him, and Allah knows best. I heard our shaykh, Abu al-Hajjaj al-Mizzi state that as well.**

House of Verification

Al-Hafiz ibn Kathir refers to this *hadith*, the *hadith* of *al-fatun*, in a number of places in his *Tafsir*. I have thoroughly eliminated it from this book of mine, and I only referred to it once, at the first instance that Ibn Kathir referred to it, at the *tafsir* of verse 40 of *Surah al-Baqarah*. After that, I avoid reference to it, so I do not refer to it except if there is some pressing need to do so. And I ask Allah for support in doing what is right and making it easy, and I ask for guidance and firmness.

One of the greatest statements indicating that the Glorious Qur'an is free of these *Isra'ili* reports is a statement of Ibn 'Abbas that al-Bukhari reports in his *Sahih*, and al-Hafiz ibn Kathir relates from him, at the *tafsir* of verse 79 from *Surah al-Baqarah*; Ibn 'Abbas said:

O community of Muslims! How can you ask the People of the Book about something, while your Book that Allah revealed to His Prophet is the most recent of reports from Allah, and you read it fresh, it has not grown old. Allah has informed you that the People of the Book altered the Book of Allah and changed it, and wrote scripture with their own hands and said, “This is from Allah,” so as to purchase by it a small gain. Does the knowledge that has come to you not prohibit you from asking them? And no, by Allah, we have not seen any of them ever asking you concerning that which has been revealed to you.

And this strong, clear admonition has been related by al-Bukhari in three places in his *Sahih* [5/515; 13/282,414 from *Fath al-Bari*].^[10]

^[1] Scholars of *Tafsir*.

^[2] These are from the words of Shaykh Ahmad Shakir himself. This type of usage is common in Arabic to make clear when a long quote is coming to an end and the author’s words are continuing.

^[3] It seems, and Allah knows best, that al-Hafiz ibn Kathir mentioned these narrations so that they could be known and recognized and because they have been quoted in the books of *Tafsir* before him so he wished to encompass the work of his predecessors. Likewise the mere fact that he mentioned these narrations in his *Tafsir* does not mean that he relied on them as the explanation of the meanings of the Qur’an, just as he did not intend that weak *hadiths* be relied on as the explanation of its meanings, yet he chose to quote all *hadiths* relevant to every topic that came up, irrespective of their level of authenticity. So what Shaykh Ahmad Shakir has said here cannot be agreed with completely.

However, one must agree that while the Prophet (ﷺ) permitted narration of *Isra’iliyat*, it is not fitting to mention these stories or weak *hadiths* in books of *Tafsir* directed to the common Muslims, as they will not have the foundational knowledge to distinguish between the correct and the incorrect, and because of the confusion and misunderstandings it would create for them, although there may be benefits in it for the scholar or the capable student of knowledge. We see, for example, that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr is one of those who reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) permitted the study of *Isra’iliyat*. On the day of Yarmuk, he obtained two full loads of books of *Ahl al-Kitab*. So, he clearly he understood that it is permissible to study their books. It should be kept in mind, however, that our primary focus should be study of the Qur’an and the Sunnah as shall be mentioned in the statement of ibn ‘Abbas shortly. Such was, in fact, the case with ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr. He used to recite the Qur’an completely every seven nights, and according to the testimony of Abu Hurayrah himself, he knew more *hadiths* than even Abu Hurayrah! Clearly, there is a difference between someone of that level of scholarship reading the Books of *Ahl al-Kitab* and a layman.

Without doubt, the *Tafsir* of Imam ibn Kathir is a scholarly work addressed to a knowledgeable audience, so Imam ibn Kathir, may Allah reward him for his tremendous work, is free of blame in that regard. And Allah knows best.

^[4] Plural of *Hafidh*, a title for great scholars of *Hadith*.

^[5] One free of error: Allah or His Messengers.

^[6] A *hadith* that is “raised up,” that is: it goes back all the way to the Prophet (ﷺ).

[7] Heretics who seek to undermine the religion.

[8] Since that time, an-Nasa'i's book, *As-Sunan al-Kubra*, has been printed and made available, and all praise is due to Allah.

[9] Going back to a Sahabi, not the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

[10] This quote reaffirms what I mentioned in a previous footnote: it is not appropriate for the average Muslim to busy himself with *Isra'iliyat*, because at best, they will distract him from understanding the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). At worst, it will confuse him and mislead him concerning important matters of his religion. The learned person, however, is allowed to study such narrations because this is not feared him. So it is that we see in the *hadith* of *al-Fatun* referred to by Shaykh Ahmad Shakir, that ibn 'Abbas himself narrated matters that come from the *Isra'iliyat*, and in fact, he did so in the context of discussing the verses of the Qur'an. It is important also to keep in mind the audience of ibn 'Abbas. He only mentioned those things when he asked about them by Sa'id ibn Jubayr, one of ibn 'Abbas' greatest students, who, in his own right, became a great Imam in *Tafsir*, to say nothing of the other sciences of Islam.

Thought provoking challenges:

Harris has raised the notion that some of the Ashari's fabricate narrations in order to spread creedal points, but may be Harris et al can explain if they are prepared to call someone a fabricator if he tried to affirm that Allah is sitting ("julus") on the Kursi by attributing a narration to the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam), from a narration ascribed to the Musnad of Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal going back to Ibn Abbas (ra). Can Harris tell us if the following is in the Musnad with the highlighted wording and if it isn't – then what is the Islamic ruling on the one who added this wording for Julus, or the one who conveys it as a proof (Hujja) to establish his Aqeeda? It would be appreciated if they can be straight up; no beating around the bush is needed for the answer.

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya claimed in his *Ijtima al-Juyush al-Islamiyya* (a work that Harris appears to be quite fond of), p. 44:

وفي مسند الإمام أحمد من حديث ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قصة الشفاعة، الحديث بطوله

مرفوعا وفيه: "فَآتَى رَبِّي عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَأَجَدَهُ عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ أَوْ سُرِيرِهِ جَالِسًا"

The later exponent of the so called "Salafi" creed, who is also said to have been a Hanbali in fiqh, known as Ibn al-Uthaymin has also alluded to this

last narration mentioned by Ibn al-Qayyim in his Majmu Fatawa (1/135) as follows:

أما تفسيره بالجلوس فقد نقل ابن القيم في الصواعق 1303/4 عن خارجه بن مصعب في قوله تعالى: (الرحمن على العرش استوى) قوله: "وهل يكون الاستواء إلا الجلوس". اهـ. **وقد ورد ذكر الجلوس في حديث أخرجه الإمام أحمد عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما مرفوعاً. والله أعلم.**

Thus, Harris who is probably on the way of not only Ibn al-Qayyim but also Ibn Uthaymin on creedal matters needs to provide this narration with the precise wording for Julus as they both claimed. If he can not find it then he needs to explain why his Imams used such a narration and what is the ruling on them for using such a narration?!

Harris and Co had no problem with attacking Isa al-Himyari for his publication of the so called lost Juz of the Musannaf, since it was clearly a forgery, but less us see how just they are. We await them to say what they've said about Himyari on those who also spread forgeries in the name of Allah's Messenger (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and then convey them as though they exist in the Musnad of Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal. May be they can also inform the keen readers what is the status of the imitator of Ibn al-Qayyim on the above narration, namely the late Ibn Uthaymin (d. 2001), who mentioned in his Fatwa the following:

Harris was quite keen to mention that some narrations attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib (ra) negating Makan as mentioned by Imam Abdal Qahir al-Baghdadi in his Farq bayn al-Firaq were lacking any known chains of transmission. But, let us see how his likes deal with the following narration attributed back to Ali (ra) who is said to have narrated the following from the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam). The following was quoted by Harris's Imam in Aqeeda – Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his Ijtima (p. 71) and in his Hadi al-Arwah (p. 309):

- فصل وأما حديث علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه فقال يعقوب بن سفيان حدثنا محمد بن المصنف حدثنا سويد بن عبد العزيز حدثنا عمرو بن خالد عن زيد بن علي عن أبيه عن جده عن **علي بن أبي طالب** قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لا يزور أهل الجنة الرب تبارك وتعالى في كل جمعة وذكر ما يعطون قال ثم يقول الله تبارك وتعالى اكشفوا حجابا فيكشف حجاب ثم

حجاب ثم يتجلى لهم تبارك وتعالى عن وجهه فكأنهم لم يروا نعمة قبل ذلك وهو قوله تبارك وتعالى: {وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ}

Can the likes of the anti-Ash'arites of today tell us if the above narration is Sahih, Hasan, da'eef or is it Mawdu (fabricated)? If it is the last category, why did this grand Imam of the so called Salafi/Athari sect – Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya - bring such narrations forward? Is it permissible to use such a narration in matters of creed in your so called “Salafi” creed?

Harris has also shown his connection for the Khalq Af'al al-Ibad of Imam al-Bukhari in the past, thus it would be useful to tell which faction he is with from the early Hanabila based on the following point:

Imam al-Bukhari mentions two factions of Hanbalites in his time in the Khalq Af'al al-Ibad (p. 28):

فأما ما احتج به الفريقان لمذهب أحمد ويدعيه كل لنفسه فليس بثابت كثير من أخبارهم وربما لم يفهموا دقة مذهبه بل المعروف عن أحمد وأهل العلم أن كلام الله غير مخلوق وما سواه مخلوق وأنهم كرهوا البحث والتتقيب عن الأشياء الغامضة وتجنبوا أهل الكلام والخوض والتنازع إلا فيما جاء فيه العلم وبينه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم

This was translated by GF Haddad as:

“As for what the two parties from the school of Ahmad have claimed as proof, each for his own position: Much of what they relate is not established as authentic. It is probably they did not comprehend the subtleness of his position. What is known from Ahmad and the people of knowledge is that Allah's speech is uncreated and all else is created. But they hated to discuss and explore obscure matters, avoiding dialectic theologians and their queries and disputations, except in what was a matter of knowledge and which the Prophet Sallallahu alaihi wa sallam clarified.”

Since Harris is claiming to be on the manhaj of Imam al-Bukhari in creedal matters, it may be useful if he can clarify what his stance is with other famous Imams of Hadith who also knew the creed of the Salaf. Indeed, Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi mentioned the following in his al-Jarh wa Ta'dil (7/191) regarding Imam al-Bukhari based on the judgements of his father, Abu Hatim al-Razi and his colleague, Abu Zur'a al-Razi:

قال في ترجمة البخاري : (محمد بن إسماعيل البخاري أبو عبدالله ، قدم عليهم الري سنة 250 ، روى عن عبدان المروزي ، وأبي همام الصلت بن محمد ، والفريابي ، وابن أبي أويس ، سمع منه أبي وأبو زُرعة ثم تركا حديثه عندما كتب إليهما محمد بن يحيى النيسابوري أنه أظهر عندهم أن لفظه بالقرآن مخلوق) . أهـ

There's no doubt that Imam al-Bukhari has given his side of the argument and the claims made against him, but Harris et al can ponder over why Abu Hatim, Abu Zur'a and Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Naysaburi opposed him...

Another point for Harris et al:

Imam al-Bukhari mentioned in Mu'allaq form the Tafsir of Sa'eed ibn Jubayr that the Kursi is Allah's Knowledge:

صحيح البخاري، الإصدار 2.03 - للإمام البخاري
الجزء الثالث << 68 - كتاب التفسير. << 46 - باب: {فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا فَإِذَا أَمْتُمْ
فاذكروا الله كما

وقال ابن جبير: {كرسيه} /255/: علمه. يقال: {بسطة} /247/: زيادة وفضلا. {أفرغ}

Once again, Muhsin Khan from the pseudo-Salafi sect left out the translation of the above from Ibn Jubayr (ra), who was from the leading students of the Sahabi, Abdullah ibn Abbas (ra). See his edition of the Sahih (6/44). Will the likes of Harris accept this Tafsir from Ibn Jubayr or will they use the explanations of later authors like ibn Manda.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani authenticated the mu'allaq narration from Ibn Jubayr in his Fath al-Bari:

قوله: (وقال ابن جبیر: **كرسيه** علمه) **وصله سفيان الثوري في تفسيره في رواية أبي حذيفة عنه بإسناد صحيح**، وأخرجه عبد بن حميد وابن أبي حاتم من وجه آخر عن سعيد بن جبیر فزاد فيه " عن ابن عباس " وأخرجه العقيلي من وجه آخر عن سعيد بن جبیر عن ابن عباس عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، وهو عند الطبراني في " كتاب السنة " من هذا الوجه مرفوعا، وكذا رويناه في " فوائد أبي الحسن علي بن عمر الحربي " مرفوعا والموقوف أشبه.

Wallahu a'lam

Wassalam

Abul Hasan

January 2010/Muharram 1431 AH



House of Verification